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This dissertation, CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERSHIP: AN EXPLORATION OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, by MICHELLE FARMER, was prepared under the direction on the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

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CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERSHIP: AN EXPLORATION OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

MICHELLE C. FARMER

Under the Direction of Sheryl Cowart Moss, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Principal supervisors are responsible for developing and enhancing the instructional leadership capacity of the principals they support. With this responsibility in mind, the primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the influence of professional learning for principal supervisors on their instructional leadership capacity. Sociocultural learning theory framed this case-oriented comparative study that sought to examine how principal supervisors learn and how school districts make the learning possible. Similarities and differences of individuals were explored. Qualitative data was gathered from documents, questionnaires, interviews, and observations of principal supervisors, as well as from questionnaires given to principals in the participating district. The district included in the study was located in the Southeastern United States and was chosen through purposeful sampling. Using the Vygotsky Space model, the nature of professional learning for principal supervisors was examined.

Evidence of individual and collective learning was coded through four iterative phases: (a) appropriation, (b) transformation, (c) publication, and (d) conventionalization. Qualitative analysis of the coded data helped identify themes and uncover potential relationships between professional learning for principal supervisors and the principal supervisors' ability to support and develop principals. Findings from the study speak to the need for specifically designed programs for principal supervisors. The findings highlighted similarities between the knowledge and skills both principal supervisors and principals believed were needed to better support principals. The outcomes described in the findings also pointed to a need for principal supervisors to engage in learning experiences that are both public and private and encourage growth for the individual and across the team of principal supervisors.

INDEX WORDS: Principal supervisor, Principal, School district, Instructional leadership capacity, Sociocultural learning theory, Appropriation, Transformation, Publication, Conventionalization

**CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERSHIP: AN EXPLORATION OF PRINCIPAL
SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

by

MICHELLE C. FARMER

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

in

Department of Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2017

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my educational journey and this dissertation to my fabulous family. Without their patience, understanding, love, and support, this goal would not have been achieved. A special message goes out to my granddaughter, Adalyn. Whether you become a doctor, a performer, or an ice cream maker, dream big and follow your dreams wherever they take you!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Sheryl Cowart Moss, chair of my dissertation committee, for her guidance and feedback throughout this intellectual journey and for encouraging me to share the view of educational leadership from a practitioner's perspective. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Yinying Wang, (thanks also for your support at UCEA), and Dr. Glenn Pethel, (a great boss who allowed me to infuse my study into our day to day work) for their time and assistance. I am most appreciative of Dr. Jami Berry for being my, and our whole cohort's, cheerleader, confidant, and friend during the entire three years of our program. To my cohort members, I thank you for your support, encouragement, and friendship. Small yet mighty Cohort III!

A special thank you goes to the participants of this study. No one works harder or does a better job on behalf of children than the principal supervisors and principals of Gwinnett County Public Schools. Thank you for responding to my surveys and questionnaires, allowing me to interview you, and accepting me as a peer during school visits and observations. You shared your thoughts, ideas, and work openly and honestly. Thank you for all you do every day to encourage high levels of teaching and learning for all of Gwinnett's children!

The past three years have been quite an undertaking. Adding the physical, mental, and financial costs of a doctoral program to the daily demands of work and life is challenging for the doctoral student, but she, in theory, knows what she is getting into. Her family...not so much. I will never be able to truly thank my family enough for their sacrifices made while I, unsuccessfully, attempted to balance home, work, and school. I love you guys bunches and I am so glad you made it through the workload, and my moments of insanity, virtually unscathed. To my husband, Scottie, I did it, I'm through, and I promise this is my very last graduate program and degree EVER! To Kailyn, Michael, and Adalyn, I'm back, so let the fun times begin! To my parents, my sister and her family, and my mother-in-law, I'm looking forward to fun family times at the lake, without having to sneak away to write! To the rest of my wonderful family and fabulous friends, I thank you for all of the love, support, and encouragement you have poured into me through the years, I am indebted to you and will forever be grateful!

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1 EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

Leadership matters. Determining the impact of leadership on schools continues to be an area of interest in research, within policy discussions, and throughout the education community (Hattie, 2015; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). In the research, school leaders, namely principals, were second only to teachers among school-based factors when it came to affecting students' learning outcomes (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The findings were noteworthy since the influence of principals' direct and indirect leadership practices equals about one-quarter of their schools' total effect on students' learning (Leithwood et al., 2004).

The analysis of principal characteristics from the Center for Public Education (Hull, 2012) found the most effective principals have three or more years of experience, promote shared leadership and set the vision for their schools, and are strong instructionally. The findings also pointed to the school district as a possible influencing factor. In successful school systems, district office leaders provided the guidance needed to develop the teaching and learning capacity within schools and set the leadership expectations of their principals (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Waters and Marzano's meta-analysis, *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement* (2006), uncovered a significant correlation, with a 95% confidence interval, between district leadership and student achievement. Their findings suggested student achievement increased when district leaders carried out their leadership responsibilities effectively. University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership found when the capacity of district leaders - in the form of principal supervisors -

was fully developed, the positive impact on student achievement was felt throughout the organization (Honig et al., 2010).

The emerging role of the principal supervisor was one primarily focused on the support and development of principals as instructional leaders. However, researchers (Bottoms, Schmidt-Davis, & Southern Regional Education Board, 2010; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010; Honig et al., 2010) identified barriers to the success of principal supervisors. These obstacles included:

- Selection based on experience instead of results;
- Lack of evidence of candidates' ability to develop others,
- Lack of a clear job description,
- Large caseloads of principals to support; and
- Numerous compliance-based duties in addition to supporting principals.

The discrepancy between scholarly recommendations for the selection and training of principal supervisors and the traditional practices of school districts created a need for careful examination of how principal supervisor training influences principal effectiveness on student achievement.

Guiding Questions

This study seeks to explore ways principal supervisors approach and experience professional development in a large urban school district. The following questions guided the study:

1. How do principal supervisors know they have the knowledge and skills needed to support principals effectively?
2. How do principals identify principal supervisor practices as ones that help them improve their effectiveness as school level leaders?

3. How can school districts enhance professional development for principal supervisors?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher considered many factors. A brief review of education reform in America, including the concept of leader effectiveness, helped uncover the dynamics pulling at educational leadership from a variety of sources.

National reform efforts.

Calls for educational reform to correct issues within the public education system have been part of American political culture since before the birth of the country (Gross, 2014; Iorio, 2011; Jennings, 2012). Educational reform may have originated at the oldest school, Boston Latin School, in 1635 with its singular focus on the humanities (Boston Latin School, n.d.). Horace Mann's call for the common school in 1837 and John Dewey's stance on progressive education in the early 1900s aimed to improve the school experience. The Coleman Report, in 1966, uncovered inequalities in school funding. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* asserted that public schools were failing. No Child Left Behind / Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) focused on high-stakes assessments and accountability in 2002 and reintroduced the idea of school choice and charter schools. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) introduced the Race to the Top Assessment Program (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) in an attempt to jumpstart innovation in education in 2010. The ongoing effort to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with incentives for change in the form of flexibility waivers (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) was another attempt at shaping or changing the public education system based on the motivation of the group enforcing the reform. In December 2015, ESEA was successfully reauthorized with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The intent of ESSA was to make

education equitable for disadvantaged and high-needs students while ensuring all students were prepared for success in college and career. The signing of ESSA came seven years after the scheduled reauthorization of ESEA and after much debate about the role of and balance between federal, state, and local government control of educational decision making (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016).

Documented disparities in academic performance between groups of students surfaced in a variety of school measures: grades, test scores, course participation, high school completion, college acceptance, and college completion (Education Trust, 2013). The inequities attributed to these differences caused many reform-minded educators and non-educators to enter into the reform arena. The majority of those concerned about inequity in education recognized the need to decrease the gap between sub-groups of students, and many solutions were attempted. Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (2011) identified reducing class size, expanding early childhood programs, raising academic standards for all, and improving the quality of teachers of poor and minority students as potential solutions. However, the academic gap between students persisted. The National Governor's Association (2010) also recognized the need for consistency in what students were expected to know and do by the time they completed high school, regardless of where they lived. Therefore, governors and other state leaders from 48 states and the District of Columbia developed the Common Core State Standards based on standards already in existence and feedback from teachers, content experts, and others in the field of education, as well as the public.

Leader effectiveness.

A recent focus of educational research spotlighted the impact of educational leadership on student achievement (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Johnston,

Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). However, variances existed in the identification of strong leaders. Information from the Council of Chief State School Officers (Canole & Young, 2013) suggested that states typically used outdated leadership standards that did not encompass principals' day-to-day reality to measure leaders' effectiveness. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), under the umbrella of the Council of Chief State School Officers, met this challenge by creating common standards for school leaders, first in 1996, and updated in 2008. The report, *Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leaders*, was developed as a companion to the ISLLC standards (Sanders & Kearney, 2008). These leader performance expectations and indicators:

Represent[ed] consensus among state education agency policy leaders about the most necessary actions required of K–12 education leaders to improve teaching and learning. The main purpose of the Performance Expectations and Indicators [was] to provide a resource for policymakers and educators in states, districts, and programs to analyze and prioritize expectations of education leaders in various roles and at strategic stages in their careers. They [were] also intended to support national, state, and local dialog about how to improve leadership (Sanders and Kearney, 2008, p. 1).

In 2015, organizations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and American Association of School Administrators (AASA) came together to take a new look at educational leadership research and practice. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), a consortium of the above mentioned and other professional organizations, created the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) to replace the ISLLC standards, and reflect the changes in educational leadership and define the role with a clearer focus on students and student outcomes (NPBEA, 2015).

Identifying expectations for school leaders represented just one of the interventions states used to level the playing field for students (Young et al., 2013). However, individual school leader's level of effectiveness was not the only factor needed to increase student achievement. Bottoms et al., in *The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support, and Principal Leadership* (2010) stressed that states missed opportunities to create deeper reform when they by-passed school districts and focused on individual schools. Through their research, they identified specific strategies used by supportive districts to ensure principals' success in improving learning opportunities for students throughout their districts. The strategies included:

- a framework focused on core beliefs, effective practices, and goals for improving student achievement;
- the support of the school board and district office;
- instructional coherence and support;
- professional learning at all levels of the organization;
- data linking student achievement to school and classroom practices;
- the use of resources to improve student learning, and
- processes to involve key school and community leaders in shaping the vision for improving schools (Bottoms et al., p.2).

However, district leaders, along with their principals, needed to first define their desired outcomes in order to increase the effectiveness of all leaders and create alignment and cohesion across their districts (Hitt, Tucker, Young, & University Council for Educational Administration, 2012).

Review of the Literature

American school district leaders were under pressure to increase student achievement (Bottoms et al., 2010; Casserly et al., 2011; Mitgang, 2013; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). A focus on developing the capacity of principals offered a renewed motivation for central office leaders (Bennett, Ylimaki, Dugan, & Brunderman, 2014; Honig, 2012). Principal supervisors emerged as the link connecting the principal to the central office. Consequently, district leaders repurposed their people and practices to discover innovative ways to enhance the link to boost student performance (Alvoid & Black Jr., 2014).

The following is a review of the literature that called attention to the changing role of school leaders. First, the transition of the principal from manager to instructional leader was explored (Honig & Rainey, 2014). Next, the shift of the principal supervisor from impartial evaluator to invested developer of school principals was studied (Darfler, Riggan, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, & GE Foundation, 2013). Then, the evolution of the central office from compliance focused to a means for increasing students' learning potential was investigated (Honig, 2013). Finally, the need for wide-scale school reform that expands the responsibility and accountability of all educators was examined (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). These changing roles resulted in a need to prepare students for success in school and at the next level, college and career, beginning at the district level (Corcoran et al., 2013; Duffy, Hannan, O'Day, Brown, & California Collaborative on District Reform, 2012; Honig, 2012). These foundational ideas shaped this literature review and ultimately this study on professional development for principal supervisors.

Role of the Principal

Research from Davis et al., (2005) and Leithwood et al., (2004) supported the belief that principals played a critical role in setting the tone and direction within schools and had a lasting impact on student achievement. The way principals went about establishing, selecting, and maintaining the structures, processes, and people within schools was very different from building to building. According to Leithwood et al. (2004), successful principals knew their schools and communities well. They intentionally matched procedures and initiatives to fit internal and external needs while creating equity within the school. They were diligent about increasing the capacity of staff to meet students' learning needs. Davis et al., (2005) reported the critical knowledge and skills principals needed to be effective instructional leaders involved facilitating and supporting teaching and learning with a focus on continuous growth and improvement. In *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship*, Portin et al. (2003) agreed instructional leadership was vital to principals' effectiveness. They emphasized principals' primary purpose was to determine their schools' needs then develop a plan to meet the needs, using all available resources.

In *Rethinking Leadership*, Sergiovanni (1999) described five tiers of leadership, in ascending order, technical leadership, human leadership, educational leadership, symbolic leadership, and cultural leadership. The determination of a school's needs is based on the leadership level of the principal. The effectiveness of a principal is dependent upon his skills at the first three levels. Excellence, according to Sergiovanni, can only be achieved when the top two tiers are obtained. He also suggested a shift in thinking about the principalship that was less about management techniques and more about a set of beliefs, norms, and principles that guides

the individual and represents the collective thinking and actions of the organization to which the individual belongs (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Educational literature has identified a wide range of leader standards, competencies, and dispositions (Cuban, 1988; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 2007; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Northouse, 2013; Senge, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1991). Encompassed in the findings were instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, strategic, external development, and micropolitical themes. In a review of the research, Seashore-Louis et al., (2010) concluded while successful principals ensured the representation of each within their schools, they understood they did not have to possess all the competencies and dispositions themselves. These principals maximized the talents of their teams to create the organizational structure and determine the collective processes for functioning within their schools. Studies to determine school leaders' influence on student achievement confirmed principals' actions shape their schools' success (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). The most effective principals aligned people, practices, and resources by expertly balancing operational tasks with instructional needs. The Wallace Foundation, a philanthropy committed to the improvement of learning opportunities and outcomes for children, identified five pivotal practices that, when executed in tandem, exemplify the instructional leadership capabilities of exemplary principals. They described these leadership moves as:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students;
- Creating a climate hospitable to education;
- Cultivating leadership in others;
- Improving instruction; and
- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (2013, p. 4).

Principal training.

With increased emphasis on accountability measures, the responsibility of improving student achievement fell to principals (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Estrella-Henderson & Jessop 2015; Johnston et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Principals needed quality professional learning to help them mobilize the pressure to achieve academic results by developing their own and their teachers' instructional skills and practices. They wanted techniques to ensure their schools' culture, climate, and vision were focused on high levels of teaching and learning plus training to create robust learning environments for children (Davis et al., 2005). Hallinger and Murphy (2013) suggested, "Capacity development is not only a means of achieving improved learning outcomes but also an avenue leading out of the time management [dead end]" (p. 16) that prevented principals from finding a balance between instructional and operational leadership needs.

To meet the needs of new, novice, and veteran principals, districts, universities, non-profits, and for-profits began developing principal training programs (Cheney, Davis, Garrett, & Holleran, 2010; Mitgang, 2012). The Rainwater Leadership Alliance (2008), a coalition dedicated to the development and support of school leaders, studied promising leader development programs and identified the keystones that connected a variety of program designs and approaches (Cheney et al., 2010). The most highly effective principal preparation programs each had defined competency frameworks, recruited strategically and proactively, had rigorous and highly selective evaluation processes, based training and development on authentic experiences, provided ongoing support for graduates, and continuously sought ways to improve program components and outcomes for graduates on behalf of the students they would lead.

The Wallace Foundation also wanted to learn more about developing successful principals and school leaders. In 2010, the foundation awarded a five-year grant to six large, urban school districts with the goal of learning more about their principal pipeline development. The Wallace Foundation, leaders in grantee districts, training providers, and third party evaluators defined strategies, chronicled processes, and shared results, all with the ultimate goal of providing a roadmap for others committed to ensuring there was a highly qualified principal in every school across the country (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013). Hitt et al., (2012) recommended when districts engage in the creation of principal development programs for pre-service leaders, they first assess their internal recruitment strategies, develop strategic partnerships with universities, and deeply scrutinize their current candidate selection process. They further advise that preparation programs include social support networks. Similarly, they advised districts revamping support for in-service leaders to assess the structure of their leadership development programs to include high quality mentoring and dedicate time for principals to engage in meaningful professional development. Additionally, Turnbull, Riley, and MacFarlane (2015) reported on the emerging best practices of The Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI) grantees to strengthen school leadership in their districts. Each developed a leader tracking data system for use in leader selection and development processes and for evaluating training programs. These districts worked to clearly define and articulate their leader standards and competencies to frame leaders' roles and create a common language and shared expectations throughout their district. They also solidified a differentiated approach to building leader capacity to meet individuals' specific needs at all stages of the pipeline.

Principal effectiveness.

Marzano and colleagues' (2005) statistical review of available research solidified the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. They defined and statistically linked 21 responsibilities of the school leader to positive student achievement outcomes. One of these leader responsibilities, discipline, defined as “protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus” (p. 43) accentuated principals' indirect, yet critical, influence on student achievement. Similarly, Leithwood et al., (2004) found that highly effective leaders created environments conducive to high levels of achievement by setting clear directions for their staff. These successful leaders have spent significant time “identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations” (p. 24). The influence of these principal responsibilities came less from directly training teachers on effective instructional strategies and more from the relationships, support, and conditions created that encouraged high expectations for all, student and adult, and resulted in elevated levels of achievement (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). As supervisors of instruction, principals had the means to effect change at the classroom level, thereby increasing student achievement within their schools. Glanz, Shulman, & Sullivan (2007) conducted a case study on a successful New York City school and found that when “supervision is purposeful, targeted, and central to promoting a school wide instructional program” (p. 2), gains in student achievement followed.

Principal evaluation.

Stronge, Xu, and Leeper (2013) argued the way to increase the possibility of highly effective principals leading schools was to establish an evaluation system that focused on growing and developing principals while holding them accountable for academic results.

Sergiovanni (2006) suggested national principal standards had some limitation at the local level and should be used as a foundation for localized principal evaluation systems based on the needs of individual school districts. Unfortunately, many school districts did not use research based evaluation systems that focused on principals' behaviors and student achievement. They "rarely [measured, documented, or used] effectiveness ratings to inform decision making. As a result, it [was] difficult to distinguish among poor, average, good, and excellent principals" (p. 6). The results from a survey of principal supervisors in *Principal Evaluations and the Principal Supervisor: Results from the Great City Schools* collected by Casserly, Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, & Palacios (2013) highlighted the lack of differentiation in principal evaluations. Ninety-six percent of principal supervisors, those typically charged with evaluation, believed the intent of their districts' evaluation system was to improve principal effectiveness, yet only 35% reported that student achievement results were the basis for their district's evaluation system.

Role of the Principal Supervisor

Understanding the importance of ensuring the most qualified principals were leading schools drove districts to examine the role of their principal supervisors (Casserly et al., 2011; Corcoran et al., 2013; Glanz et al., 2007; Leithwood, 2010). By designing new or redefining old positions, district leaders assigned principal supervisors the responsibility of helping principals increase academic achievement within their schools (Corcoran et al., 2013). In *Districts Matter: Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need*, Mitgang (2013) affirms, "The titles [varied] and [included] principal supervisor, managing principal, executive director, and assistant superintendent. Job duties [differed], too. Some, both [coached] and formally [evaluated] principals, while others [did] not" (p. 28). Casserly et al., (2013) analyzed survey results from The Wallace Foundation's PPI districts to learn more about how they defined and operated

within their role as principal supervisors. They found a variety of titles used to represent the position of principal supervisor and the number of principal supervisors per district varied from a low of two to a high of 41. The number of years employed in the role of principal supervisor spanned from as few as one year to as many as 11 years. The majority of respondents reported they previously were principals (97%) and teachers (95%) before transitioning to the role of principal supervisor. Survey completers indicated they reported directly to a superintendent (20%), deputy superintendent (15%), or chief academic officer (13%). Responding principal supervisors had from three to 100 principals reporting directing to them, with an average caseload of 24 principals. Some also had a clerk, principal mentor/coach, and/or content/program specialist to assist them with their caseloads (Casserly et al., 2013).

Principal supervisor duties and responsibilities.

Principal supervisor duties and responsibilities have shifted and evolved (Corcoran et al., 2013); Honig et al., 2010). Casserly et al. (2013) found the top five reported tasks of the surveyed Wallace PPI principal supervisors were to visit schools, discuss instructional issues with principals, evaluate principals, coach principals, and conduct professional development with principals. Interaction with assistant principals in the form of evaluation, professional development, or coaching was minimal. The survey asked a variation of the same question in an attempt to distinguish between routine duties and responsibilities and specific actions that directly supported principals. The top five actions to strengthen principals' effectiveness, according to survey results, were to discuss school performance data with principals, visit classrooms with principals, discuss principals' performance, discuss teacher performance with principals, and assist principals in responding to issues raised by parents or community. Principal

supervisors also indicated their involvement in additional tasks related to district administrative issues and district compliance issues.

Casserly and colleagues further clarified the emerging shifts and growing importance of the role of the principal supervisor in the six districts. The survey results revealed challenges from the lack of experience in the role of principal supervisor to the demands of being the instructional leader and sole supporter for large numbers of principals with little support themselves. In addition, principal supervisors expressed a need to increase the amount of quality instructional time spent with principals since they were accountable for their principals' effectiveness on student achievement. They faced the difficulty of balancing the additional time devoted to coaching and developing principals with the upsurge of administrative issues at the district level. "This evolution and how it is defined and managed will be an increasingly important lever for urban school systems to boost student achievement in the years ahead" (Casserly et al., 2013, p. 23).

Principal supervisor impact on student achievement.

Research has linked principal supervisors' practices with student achievement (Honig, 2012; Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014; Rainey & Honig, 2015). The influence of principal supervisors on student achievement was indirect and worked through school principals in the form of leadership support and capacity building (Rainey & Honig, 2015). In a study aimed at finding a connection between successful district leadership and school leadership, Mombourquette & Bedard (2014) identified four principal supervisor practices that principals believed help them improve or sustain student achievement:

1. Set the vision and goals for the school collaboratively.

With student learning as the primary goal, a partnership between principal and supervisor

purposefully yet flexibly focused all stakeholders on school and students' needs and ensured principals' voice in decision-making processes.

2. Share expertise in the collection and use of evidence of student learning.
Principals and supervisors owned the data from a variety of sources and used it to determine student growth. Quantitative and qualitative data collected from new measurement tools helped to align school and classroom actions to school and district goals.
3. Provide job-embedded, differentiated professional development for principals.
Principal supervisors acted as broker of resources to provide training from content and/or instructional experts to specific schools. They arranged for principal participation in state and/or national professional growth activities. They facilitated principal learning networks or retreats for principals with like goals and/or needs. Regardless of the type of professional development offered, the intense focus was on principal growth and development, on what would make the most difference for schools.
4. Align support for student learning.
A greater presence in schools by principal supervisors, deeper conversations about real issues, and the flattening of the organizational structure to merge district and school leadership into one force created a unified focus on student learning.

The intense focus was on principal growth and development, on what would make the most difference for students (Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014).

Principal supervisor training and development.

Leadership, from the local and district levels, helped schools successfully navigate reform initiatives and positively affect student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Leithwood et al., (2004) found that in addition to superintendents and principals, other district leaders influenced student achievement through their interaction with schools and school leaders. Leithwood and colleagues (2004) advised, "Efforts to improve their recruitment, training, evaluation, and ongoing development should be considered highly cost-effective approaches to

successful school improvement” (p. 14). Saphier and Durkin (2011) agreed and theorized developing principal supervisors’ competencies around supporting and coaching principals may be the key to district wide improvement. Darling-Hammond et al., (2003) went on to express that a focused commitment to professional learning and high level, meaningful instruction facilitated by district leaders led to improvement in academic achievement and “[turned] upside down many traditional notions of the relationship between bureaucracy and innovation” (p. 52).

Additional findings from Casserly and associates’ (2013) survey of Wallace PPI principal supervisors, highlighted principal supervisors’ need for more training and development on coaching strategies to support principals (18%), less meetings and more time to work with principals (15%), leadership training (14%), and instructional strategies training (10%). Nine percent reported having no professional development during the previous year. Casserly et al. (2013) called attention to the respondents who indicated they received professional development in areas directly related to building principals’ instructional leadership capacity. These specifically trained principal supervisors were more likely to visit schools, work with principals on instructional issues, and provide meaningful feedback through the evaluation process (Casserly et al., 2013).

As the role of the principal supervisor continued to change, Ovando and Huckestein (2003) shared that those in the position needed ongoing professional learning opportunities that provided them “with the understandings, skills, and dispositions needed to respond to the ever changing school environments and to promote excellence and equity in all schools” (p. 25). Anderson, Mascall, Stiegelbauer, and Park (2012) reported intentional engagement of principal supervisors in active research and analysis regarding school and student performance increased their understanding of the factors that contributed to students’ academic success. They shared

this type of training “can lead to the identification of specific schools or clusters of schools sharing similar concerns, and thus a more differentiated understanding of schools and their needs for support” (p. 17).

Role of the School District Central Office

The need to increase academic results for every student has been the catalyst for change in states, districts, schools, and classrooms. Learning Forward, formerly the National Staff Development Council, found, through an extensive study, professional development “policy and practice at state, district, and school levels can lead to improved school climate, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and student achievement” (Slabine, 2011, p. i). Also believing that policy matched to practice was the way to strengthen American’s schools, 15 superintendents of some of the largest, highest achieving districts formed a consortium to take their message straight to policy makers (Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium, 2014). The recommendations to Congress by leaders of the Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium stressed an end to a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead their recommendations called for the development of a structure that tightly guided districts toward effective systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment while, simultaneously, allowed flexibility for districts to develop their internal teaching and learning capacity to meet the unique needs the students they served. Consortium leaders suggested the following steps at the federal level for local districts to have a positive impact on student achievement:

- College and career ready outcomes for all students;
- State developed plans for meeting college and career ready goals;
- All stakeholders align work to support the college and career ready outcomes;
- Limited involvement in local policy and practice;

- Provide a net to catch and support chronic underperformance and inequity;
- Accountability systems that empower instead of punish to encourage improvement and innovation;
- Accountability for all education stakeholders and education systems;
- Higher quality student learning assessments that are more formative than summative in nature (Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium, 2014, p. 2).

These district leaders and many others understood the urgency to prepare all students for future success as productive citizens in our global society. Effective educational leaders made progress addressing critical issues when they listened to and learned from each other (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). The overall health of school districts, determined by leaders' interactions with and responses to internal and external stakeholders and conditions, triggered progress or decline. In *The Advantage*, Lencioni (2012) identified minimal politics, minimal confusion, high morale, high productivity, and low turnover of talented leaders as the prescription needed to improve organizational health and stimulate growth.

School districts are critically important in creating the structure and providing the support principals need to be successful. Bottoms et al. (2010) suggested districts begin to

- provide a balanced set of professional learning experiences at the district and school levels that are aligned with the district and school strategic plans, making it a priority to develop the capacity of principals, teachers and support staff to create rich, engaging experiences for students;
- create active professional learning communities in which key district and school leaders have common learning experiences;
- provide induction programs and mentoring for new principals and teachers;

- provide time for professional development;
- help school leaders develop a school culture based on the belief that students can succeed at high levels when they have a sense of belonging and support, can relate their learning activities to their goals and are supported to make greater effort to succeed; and
- have a professional learning plan that continuously increases the capacity of district staff to support principals and schools (p. 27).

Districts directly affect student achievement by promoting or hindering the instructional programs in their schools. To increase effectiveness, McLaughlin & Talbert (2003) noticed thriving districts operated as learning communities, built understanding of the need for systematic instructional improvement, increased two-way communication, and created dynamic data systems. The key to positively impacting student achievement was to promote and invest in learning across the district.

With the reauthorization of ESEA came a strong emphasis on leader development and support. Title II, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act provided funds for state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) to design multiple leadership pathways (including the creation of leader academies and year-long clinical residencies), induction and mentoring support structures (including two years of mentoring by carefully selected mentor coaches) , and career-spanning leader development efforts (through partnerships with organizations, the creation of communities of learners, and networking opportunities) to increase leader effectiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Title II, Part A funds could then also be used to develop the capacity of principal supervisors since they are “responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary or secondary school building: (ESEA section 8101(44)).

Professional development.

While professional development for teachers and principals was readily available, Honig (2008) stressed available training for principal supervisors consisted primarily of procedural workshops or sessions created for teachers, school leaders, and district personnel alike and did not differentiate for specific audience members' roles or areas of expertise. Professional development has had a more significant impact when embedded into policy, procedure, and practice (Guskey, 2000). Professional learning specifically for principals and principal supervisors enhanced professional development for teachers (Rainey & Honig, 2015). To build the capacity of those responsible for increasing student outcomes (e.g. schools, groups, individuals) districts committed to a major investment of time and resources (Honig et al., 2010). There were no exceptions and no excuses - the purpose of professional development for district leaders was to ensure high levels of learning for all students, and, by working collaboratively, schools increased their opportunities to achieve this goal (Eaker & Keating, 2009).

The re-culturing of school district supervision from management to instructional capacity building changed the type of support schools needed (Darfler et al., 2013). Mombourquette and Bedard (2014) observed decision-making based on data created a need for principal supervisors to understand a variety of data sources and to identify indicators of student growth. Principal supervisors needed to engage principals in the use of data to guide their decisions and construct collaborative strategies to reduce deficiencies as they surfaced and they needed training to do these things effectively (Mombourquette & Bedard, 2014).

Improvement measures have long focused on school factors but attention was turning to the training provided to district leaders who support principals (Honig et al., 2010; Ovando & Huckestein, 2003; Westover, 2014). An emerging strategy to embed in professional learning was

a framework that included a circle of inquiry that aided principal supervisors in helping principals increase achievement at their schools (Nelson, 2010). This circle of inquiry consisted of six steps - identify the primary then secondary problems, set measurable goals, create and execute an action plan, and gather data to determine the effectiveness of the implementation plan. The approach helped district leaders to construct new knowledge within the context of their role of supporting principals. A deliberate focus on developing principal supervisors' instructional capacity to cultivate the knowledge and skills of the principals they supported was a critical component of district reform measures. "The need for instructional capacity – having the resources to support teaching in a manner in which students learn at a high level – [was] widely recognized by policymakers, reformers, and educators" (Jaquith, 2012).

Through a joint project between the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the University of Washington's CEL, Rainey and Honig (2015) identified the emerging research and district professional learning practices needed to increase principal supervisors' instructional capacity to develop the principals they supported. Districts involved in the project carefully selected training topics and methods to develop and/or strengthen principal supervisors' ability to teach their principals to be better instructional leaders. In *Building Instructional Capacity*, Jaquith (2012) defined instructional capacity as "the collection of resources for teaching needed to provide high quality instruction" (p. 2). These resources included instructional knowledge, instructional skills, instructional relationships, and organizational structures. Principal supervisors could more effectively help their principals analyze teachers' instruction and determine professional development needs when they receive specific and targeted professional development. Copland and Blum (2007) reported, "As district leaders develop their own capacity, they become more adept at refining long-term goals and problem solving along the way" (p. 44).

School district transformation.

School district central offices could hold the key by providing the conditions schools needed to improve instructional practices (Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014; Leithwood & McCullough 2016). Paying attention to leading and lagging indicators from a variety of data points helped districts uncover effective and ineffective practices (Duffy et al., 2012). A district leader shared, “Examining their systems and the achievement of students more intensely [was] 'bone-crushing and deeply emotional'. But it [was] also the path toward improving teaching and learning, raising student achievement, and closing the achievement gap” (p. 13). Effective leadership was typically at the center of all districts making gains in academic achievement (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). The emerging themes around the idea of effective leadership were a focus on learning for all students, dynamic and distributed leadership, and sustained improvement over time. When studying leadership development programs in Alabama, Cobia, Smith, and Wood (2016) affirmed, training for leaders at every level of the organization is needed to improve leader effectiveness and collectively increase student achievement. “Districts have a responsibility to create conditions where leaders can learn and practice effective skills” (p. 41).

Fullen (2011) outlined the drivers, actions intended to improve performance, which affected schools districts’ outcomes. The wrong drivers - negative accountability, individualistic strategies, technology, and ad hoc policies - can initially appear to promote positive change but actually slow down improvement strategies over time. Lasting improvement depended on a systematic focus on the right drivers - the combination of capacity building, teamwork, pedagogy, and systemic policies - to impact positively the very culture of school districts. Kirtman’s (2014) seven core competencies of effective school leaders shifted the focus from

individual success to knowledge and development of self and others. In *Leadership: Key Competencies for Whole-System Change* (2016), Kirtman and Fullan combined positive drivers and core competencies to encourage a systems approach to collectively transform the development and support of those charged with improving teaching and learning in school districts.

Honig et al., (2010) identified the following five dimensions from a national study of how urban school district leaders transformed their work to improve teaching and learning outcomes in their schools:

Dimension 1: Learning focused partnership with school principals to deepen principals' instructional leadership practice.

Dimension 2: Assistance to the central office-principal partnership.

Dimension 3: Reorganizing and reculturing of each central office unit, to support the central office-principal partnerships and teaching and learning improvement.

Dimension 4: Stewardship of the overall central office transformation process.

Dimension 5: Use of evidence throughout the central office to support continual improvement of work practices and relationships with schools. (p. v)

Findings from the study revealed a collective approach to meeting the needs of schools.

Additionally, these researchers found an intentional joint effort of principals and leaders across the central office helped strengthen what was working, identify what was not, and enable these districts to provide resources more appropriately (Honig et al., 2010).

Using an inquiry-based approach, district leaders adjusted traditional practices to focus fully on increasing the instructional leadership capacity of principals (Portin et al., 2009). In a study of principal supervisors, Corcoran et al., (2013) identified principal supervisors as the

bonding agent between the district and schools and “have the potential to significantly impact leadership and instructional improvement at the school level” (p.55). Due to the potential impact of this position, these researchers believed districts needed to “build systems wherein the processes for selecting, deploying, supporting, and evaluating principal supervisors each work in tandem to strengthen the role of these critical staff members in schools and in the district” (p.54).

In *Noteworthy Perspectives: High Reliability Organizations in Education*, Eck, Stringfield, Reynolds, Schaffer, and Bellamy (2011) identified preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and organizing around expertise as the characteristics of high reliability organizations. Organizations also began at different stages along the reliability continuum and needed varying levels of centralized control and support over structure, processes, and people as individual schools moved from identification as poor performing to the highest level of performance, excellent. Consistent, coherent, and cohesive leadership was the catalyst for this type of systemic improvement in education when the goal of public schools was to graduate students with the knowledge and skills needed to compete in a global economy. Eck et al. (2011) pondered, “Perhaps the crux of success or failure of American education is for leaders to know which practices to hold on to, which ones to discard, and how to significantly improve the execution of effective research-based practices, as times and external demands change” (p. 43).

Summary

The review of current literature clearly articulated the emerging role of the principal supervisor as one primarily focused on supporting and developing principals as instructional leaders (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig, 2008; Honig et al., 2010; Mitgang, 2013; Ovando & Huckestein, 2003; Rainey & Honig, 2015). However, many principal

supervisor promotions occurred without clear evidence of an ability to develop others (Honig et al., 2010). Additionally, principal supervisors oversaw a large number of principals, while they simultaneously tended to numerous compliance-based duties (Casserly et al., 2013). The research also suggested a need for a systematic structure for developing principal supervisors' competencies to improve principals' effectiveness (Copland & Blum, 2007; Corcoran et al., 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004; Saphier & Durkin, 2011).

Realizing the significance of developing principal supervisors to deepen the leadership capacity of principals placed districts at the intersection of beliefs, goals, and actions (Duffy et al., 2012; Fullan, 2011; Leithwood, 2010). Districts that broke with past models and structured themselves around the needs of principals and schools reaped the benefits of increased academic achievement for all students (Darfler et al., 2013; Eck et al., 2011; Honig et al., 2010; Ikemoto et al., 2014).

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to add to current knowledge by focusing on the space between research related to principal supervisors and the practices embedded in school districts' structures and processes for developing principal supervisors. Specifically, the researcher sought to explore the influence of professional development on principal supervisors.

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2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

Determining leaders' impact on schools continues to be an area of interest in research, within policy discussions, and throughout the education community (Hattie, 2015; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). School leaders, namely principals, are second only to teachers among school-based factors when it comes to affecting students' learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2013; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). This is noteworthy since the influence of principals' direct and indirect leadership practices equals about one-quarter of the schools' total effect on students' learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Because principals are crucial levers in increasing student achievement, the Center for Public Education examined the research on factors that influence principals' effectiveness (Hull, 2012). Highly effective principals typically:

- Have more than three years of leadership experience overall;
- Have at least three years of leadership experience at that school;
- Share leadership responsibilities, rather than just delegate paperwork;
- Have a clear sense of instructional goals;
- Give ongoing, informal feedback and support toward goals;
- Conduct unannounced, informal teacher evaluations or classroom visits and give feedback afterwards;
- Have school boards and superintendents who exhibit a clear vision of what constitutes a good school and create a framework that gives principals both autonomy and support to reach those goals (p. 4).

The analysis of principals' effectiveness (Hull, 2012) from the Center for Public Education also pointed to the school district as a possible influencing factor. District office leaders provided the guidance needed to develop the teaching and learning capacity within schools when engaged in transformative change (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). Waters and Marzano's (2006) meta-analysis uncovered a significant correlation between district leadership and student achievement. Their findings suggested student achievement increased when district leaders carried out their leadership responsibilities effectively. By developing the capacity of district leaders in the form of principal supervisors, the entire organization could experience a positive impact on student achievement (Honig et al., 2010).

The emerging role of the principal supervisor was one primarily focused on supporting and developing principals as instructional leaders. However, researchers (Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, and Portin, 2010; Honig et al., 2010) identified barriers to the success of principal supervisors. These included selection based on (a) experience instead of results, (b) lack of evidence of candidates' ability to develop others, (c) lack of a clear job description, (d) large caseloads of principals to support, and (e) numerous compliance-based duties in addition to supporting principals (Casserly, Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, & Palacios, 2013; Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014). The discrepancy between scholarly recommendations for the selection and training of principal supervisors and the traditional training practices of school districts led to this research study that explored principal supervisor professional development in a large urban school district.

Guiding questions.

The following questions guided the study:

1. How do principal supervisors know they have the knowledge and skills needed to support principals effectively?

2. How do principals identify principal supervisor practices as ones that help them improve their effectiveness as school level leaders?
3. How can school districts enhance professional development for principal supervisors?

Significance of the Study

This study sought to contribute to education literature by providing insight into the role of principal supervisors, specifically training and ongoing professional learning, in a large urban school district. Existing research was limited regarding processes for increasing principal supervisors' capacity to develop others (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Additionally, while researchers such as Honig (2012) focused on the work of principal supervisors to develop principals as instructional leaders, developing and enhancing the work practices of principal supervisors had not been fully explored (Corcoran et al., 2013). Therefore, the results of this study provided recommendations for developing a systematic structure for selecting, training, and supporting principal supervisors. It also supplied the impetus for conducting additional research to further the understanding of the techniques principal supervisors can utilize to advance principal learning and development.

Methodology

Educational research has continuously strived to improve educational practice to benefit current, and future, leaders and learners (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). With the same goal in mind, the researcher utilized qualitative methods to collect a variety of perspectives on the training and development of principal supervisors and create synergy around the whys and hows chosen by study participants. The foundation for this investigation was framed in a constructivist approach to creating knowledge which did not seek to answer questions related to what, when, or how much; instead, the driving questions were how and why (Genzuck, 2009). When a sociocultural lens was applied, the how and why questions

were explored through a social context (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Applying an overarching phenomenological perspective to the investigation helped to uncover the essence of shared experiences and the process of meaning making for the individuals involved (Patton, 2002).

Theoretical framework.

Phenomenological research seeks to uncover the perceptions, beliefs, and perspectives of individuals based on an experience (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). It allows the researcher to understand an experience through the eyes of the participants by drawing out the way they make meaning of and internalize the experience. Moustakas (1994) stressed the wholeness of an experience, contending individuals cannot separate their perceptions, values, and beliefs from the experience itself. Interpretation of the experience is then unique to each individual who experiences the phenomenon.

Sociocultural learning theory.

Many tenets of phenomenological research are found in sociocultural learning theory (McPhail, 1993). Sociocultural learning theory reveals the idea that people's environment is the driving force behind their learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Specifically, each person's culture (created through symbols and tools used), language (acquired through the cultural symbols and tools) and zone of proximal development (identified as the distance between potential and actual learning) merges to aid in the learning process (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). A sociocultural learning lens applied to education creates a need to explore cultural norms and interactions to determine how principal supervisors learn from and with peers and how school districts establish the conditions to make this type of learning possible.

Using the sociocultural learning theory model, Vygotsky Space (Gallucci, DeVogt Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010), the researcher examined the nature of professional learning for

principal supervisors. Vygotsky Space contains two axes, individual/collective and public/private. Four quadrants are created when the two axes intersect (Figure 1). Learning then, in quadrant I, is public and social. Learning in quadrant II is social and private. Learning in quadrant III is private and individual. Learning in quadrant IV is individual and public. For the study, the relationships and intersections between individual and collective learning in private and public domains were viewed through appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization phases (Gallucci et al., 2010; Gallucci, 2008). Gallucci (2008) described appropriation as the way a person thinks based on collective interactions with others and transformation as private ownership of thinking. She defined publication as the individual sharing of new learning with others and conventionalization as the publically demonstrated use of the learning individually as well as in others' works. This framework helped the researcher identify the distinct phases of learning in context to the individual and the organization.

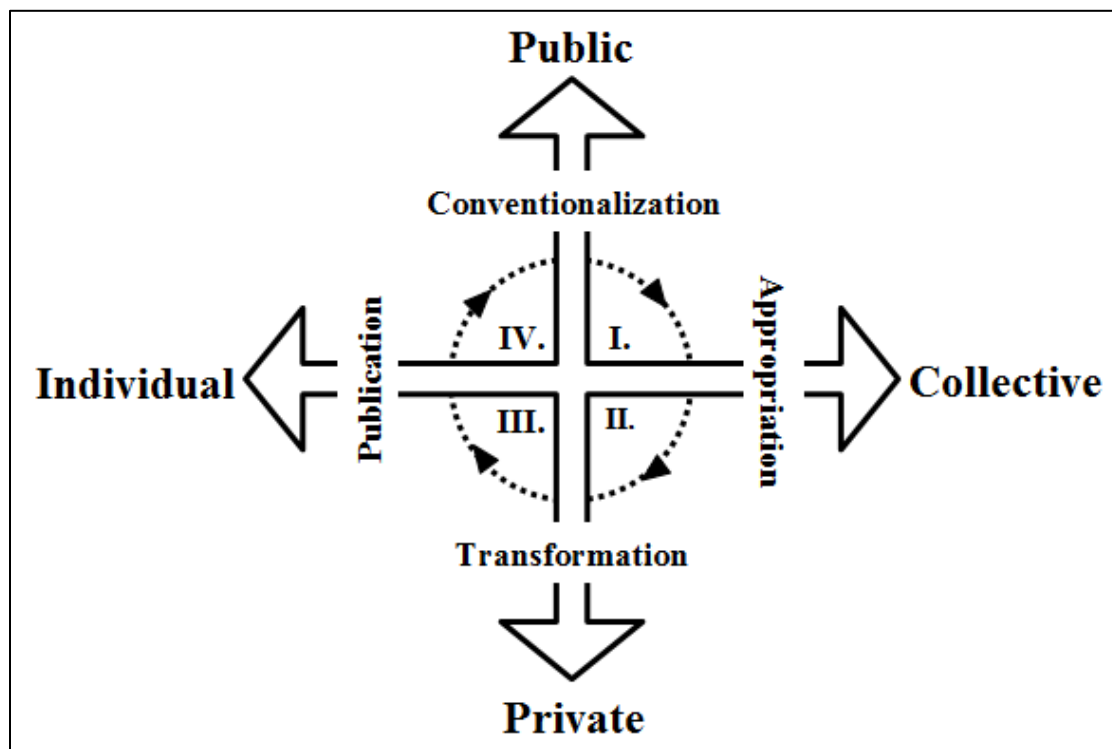


Figure 1 Vygotsky Space

The flexibility inherent of sociocultural learning theory to examine training and training structures helped to identify effective use of existing organizational structure and expertise (John-Steiner, & Mahn, 1996). The researcher sought to identify the purposeful coherence and common language around leading, teaching, and learning. Additionally, the researcher looked at the intentional pairing of those with identified expertise with others to strengthen the collective capacity of the team, and structures and processes established to scale the learning across the organization (Gallucci, 2007). Success then was dependent on the individual's and organization's commitment to learning and the learning process. Accordingly, this study explored approaches to, perceptions of, and results from strengthening principal supervisors' instructional leadership capacity through professional learning opportunities.

Research Design

To examine the influence of professional development for principal supervisors, the researcher undertook a case-oriented study of principal supervisors in a large urban school district. Case study maintains the complexity of a single principal supervisor view while exploring similarities and differences between individuals and across the team of principal supervisors (Yin, 2009). An iterative approach to the study allowed the researcher to move back and forth between theory and evidence. Instead of a linear journey, data collection and analysis began to uncover new ideas and questions, which guided the next steps needed in the collection of additional data. The process continued until the data set related to the development of principal supervisors was complete (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Methods applied within a case study design bridged the gap between qualitative and quantitative studies (Ragin, 2014). A case study approach allowed for exploration of a variety of factors associated with the training of principal supervisors while exploring the effects of their

training on the principals they support (Yin, 2009). The researcher examined how the social context of the organization and individuals influenced the effectiveness of principal supervisor training. The findings increased in transferability due to their conception within a multi principal supervisor case study (Schofield, 2002). This led to recommendations for strengthening the development and support of principal supervisors in similar settings.

Subject selection.

In 2011, The Wallace Foundation selected six school districts (see Table 1) for their Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI), a six-year, \$75-million grant to help urban school districts develop principals to improve student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2011, “The Wallace Foundation Launches”). The goal of the PPI grant, as reported by Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, and MacFarlane (2013), was to determine if by focusing heavily on specific components related to their work with new principals, urban school districts could improve teaching and learning in their districts. The identified components were (a) leader standards; (b) high quality training; (c) selective hiring; and (d) on the job evaluation and support (Turnbull et al., 2013).

Table 1

The Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative Grantees

School District	State	Student Enrollment*
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	North Carolina	147,157
Denver Public Schools	Colorado	87,398
Gwinnett County Public Schools	Georgia	179,023
Hillsborough County Public Schools	Florida	Over 200,000
New York City Department of Education	New York	Over 1,100,000
Prince George’s County Public Schools	Maryland	128,937

* 2016-2017 student enrollment as reported on school districts’ websites

In 2014, The Wallace Foundation invested an additional \$30 million in a Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI) grant aimed at shifting principal supervisors' attention from "bureaucratic compliance to principals' performance" (Wallace Foundation, 2014, "Wallace Invests"). In addition to the eight districts selected to participate in the PSI, the initial six PPI districts benefitted from the new initiative through additional funding to strengthen their principal supervisors' support of principals (see Table 2). The goals of the PSI grant were to shift the job description of principal supervisors from monitoring compliance by principals to supporting the needs of principals and to reduce principal supervisor caseloads. From a research base, The Wallace Foundation also wanted to close the grant period with a collection of lessons depicting change at the district level to support principal supervisors and evidence of the effectiveness of these changes across the districts involved in the PSI work (Wallace Foundation, 2014, "Wallace Invests").

Through purposeful sampling techniques (Creswell, 2013), Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) in Georgia, a school district grantee of both the PPI and PSI, was selected as the subject of this study. In addition to being a Wallace Foundation grantee, GCPS had a history of developing leaders. GCPS' district developed Quality-Plus Leader Academy programs highlight the district's commitment to leadership development (GCPS, 2016, "About the Quality-Plus Leader Academy). The Aspiring Principal Program (APP), the principal preparation component of QPLA, was established in 2007, and at the time of the study had graduated 223 members through ten cohorts, and had appointed 162 of the graduates to principal and district leadership positions. The Aspiring Leader Program (ALP), the assistant principal preparation component of QPLA, was established in 2010, had graduated 325 members through seven cohorts, and had appointed 259 of the graduates to assistant principal positions at the time of the study.

Gwinnett’s burgeoning realization of the need to focus on the work of principal supervisors was another factor in their selection (Wallace Foundation, 2014; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015). The choice of this single case study subject decreased variation, simplified data analysis, streamlined the interview process, and allowed for comparability across the team of GCPS principal supervisors (Patton, 2002).

Table 2

The Wallace Foundation Principal Supervisor Initiative Grantees

School District	State	Number of Principal Supervisors*
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	North Carolina	9
Denver Public Schools	Colorado	22
Gwinnett County Public Schools	Georgia	9
Hillsborough County Public Schools	Florida	8
New York City Department of Education	New York	32
Prince George’s County Public Schools	Maryland	15
Long Beach Unified School District	California	8
Des Moines Public Schools	Iowa	6
Broward County Public Schools	Florida	15
Minneapolis Public Schools	Minnesota	6
Cleveland Metropolitan School District	Ohio	8
Tulsa Public Schools	Oklahoma	11
District of Columbia Public Schools	Washington, D.C.	13

* As reported on school districts’ websites

Principal supervisors operate under the title of Assistant Superintendents in Gwinnett County Public Schools. They report to the Associate Superintendent of School Improvement and Operations, who reports directly to the CEO/Superintendent. GCPS’ principal supervisors are primarily responsible for “the continuous improvement of teaching and learning at the local school resulting in system level advancement of the mission and objectives established by the

Gwinnett County Public Schools Board of Education and Superintendent” (GCPS, Assistant Superintendent Job Description, 2016). Their duties include supporting, supervising, and evaluating assigned principals, providing instructional leadership to schools, facilitating meetings and training opportunities, and collaborating with other district leaders to live up to the district’s vision and mission. Nine former GCPS principals made up the team of principal supervisors. Their caseload assignments were based on school level and aligned with the level in which they had the most experience – elementary, middle, or high. As a principal supervisor team, 56% were female and 44% were male, 44% were black and 56% were white, and they averaged 4.67 years in the role of principal supervisor. Three principal supervisors had additional leadership experience outside of Gwinnett County. All nine GCPS principal supervisors voluntarily participated in this study and actively contributed to the research (see Table 3).

Table 3

Principal Supervisor Demographics

Principal Supervisor	PS1	PS2	PS3	PS4	PS5	PS6	PS7	PS8	PS9
Level	Middle	Elem	High	Elem	Elem	Elem	Elem	High	Middle
Caseload	17	15	15	16	18	16	18	7	17
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Race/ Ethnicity	Black	White	White	Black	Black	White	Black	White	White
Principal Experience	13	14	5	13	4.5	7.5	8	6	9
Supervisor Experience	5	4	4	11	4.5	4.5	3	4	2

Researcher’s role.

The researcher’s role was that of an insider-outsider while conducting the study. As a leader in GCPS and directly involved in The Wallace Foundation work, the researcher had

insider access to current and historical data and a connection to the Principal Pipeline Initiative and Principal Supervisor Initiative grants in the district as well as regular interactions with the district's principal supervisors. Because of the insider-researcher status, the researcher had a greater understanding of the culture of the district and could generate a more nuanced and complex interpretation of the structures, processes, and people involved in the study (Burke & Kirton, 2006). Possessing an insider status also led to an inherent bias due to the lens in which the research's work in the district and the study were viewed. To compensate for this natural bias, the researcher used a semi-structured interview approach to keep questions as consistent as possible between those interviewed while allowing for variations necessitated by individual responses. Additionally, the researcher stressed to study participants the purpose of the study, which was to explore professional development for principal supervisors and not to evaluate them as individuals. The researcher continually examined the potential influence of her own experiences and beliefs about professional development for principal supervisors throughout the study.

The researcher was also an outsider, not a principal supervisor, which allowed for more objectivity when interpreting results. The researcher's role in the district, within Leadership Development, is to develop and support new, novice, and veteran leaders from a division separate from which principal supervisors operate. While the goals of the leadership development team and principal supervisor team are similarly focused, the scope and span of control related to the day to day work of each, in connection to district principals, is very different.

According to Fay (1996), a dialectical approach maintains the intricacies of the insider similarities and outsider differences. The advantage of being an insider-outsider is in the space

between the two. It is the cross between the common ground on which the study is based and the objective conceptualization of participants' experiences and responses.

Data collection methods.

Qualitative case study research calls for spending a considerable amount of time gathering information in the natural setting (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) describes the four primary types of data collection procedures in qualitative research as documents, interviews, observations, and audiovisual materials. This study began in August 2016 and utilized documents, archival and current, as well as surveys and questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Over the course of the study, the researcher spent much time talking with, observing, and analyzing documents from the nine GCPS principal supervisors and a stratified random sampling of 20% of the principals they supported on their caseloads (see Table 4).

Table 4

Data Collection Tools Utilized in the Study

Data Collection Tool	Audience	Administration Method	Eligible Respondents	Participating Respondents
Survey	Principal Supervisors	Electronic	9	9
Open-Ended Questionnaire	Principal Supervisors	Electronic	9	7
Open-Ended Questionnaire	Principals	Electronic	29	27
Interview	Principal Supervisors	Face-to-Face	9	7
Observation	Principal Supervisors	In-Person	9	4

Documents.

Bowen (2009) recommended document analysis as part of a qualitative study to gain an understanding of the subject of the study. The advantages of document analysis were availability of the documents, exactness of the details, and broad coverage of district information (Yin, 2009). An iterative, data collection process began with the creation of a descriptive profile of Gwinnett County Public Schools from available state and local data sources. The researcher reviewed available archival demographic and academic data from the district as well as documents related to training or professional development designed for principal supervisors. This provided a contextual background of the district.

Survey.

While typically associated with quantitative studies, use of a survey in this qualitative study provided insight to trends, attitudes, and opinions of the principal supervisors involved in the study and allowed for generalization of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). The principal supervisors responded to a survey (included as Appendix B) based on the Council of Chief State School Officers Model Principal Supervisor Standards and Indicators (2015). The eight Model Principal Supervisor Standards fall into three descriptive categories: educational leadership, district leadership, and instructional leadership. Educational leadership focuses on developing the capacity of principals. District leadership connects principals with resources and information. Instructional leadership emphasizes develop of self to better support principals (see Table 5). The actual results of the survey indicated the type and impact of professional learning the principal supervisors engaged in during the past school year. Since it was based on an external, national set of principal supervisor standards, use of the survey tool established a common language and drew out common experiences across the team of nine principal supervisors.

Table 5

Model Principal Supervisors Standards Categories

Educational Leadership	District Leadership	Instructional Leadership
STANDARD 1: Principal Supervisors dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders	STANDARD 5: Principal Supervisors advocate for and inform the coherence of organizational vision, policies, and strategies to support schools and student learning	STANDARD 7: Principal Supervisors engage in their own development and continuous improvement to help principals grow as instructional leaders
STANDARD 2: Principal Supervisors coach and support individual principals and engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders	STANDARD 6: Principal Supervisors assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student	STANDARD 8: Principal Supervisors lead strategic change that continuously elevates the performance of schools and sustains high-quality educational programs and opportunities across the district
STANDARD 3: Principal Supervisors use evidence of principals' effectiveness to determine necessary improvements in principals' practice to foster a positive educational environment that supports the diverse cultural and learning needs of students		
STANDARD 4: Principal Supervisors engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders		

Questionnaires.

The use of questionnaires in case study research affords researchers an opportunity to explore the beliefs and attitudes of study participants (Kendall & Kendall, 2011). The researcher

solicited information from principal supervisors in GCPS using an open-ended questionnaire to gather information about the knowledge and skills they felt were needed to effectively support principals. Questions also asked about the practices the principal supervisors felt were valued by their principals to help them improve as instructional leaders and their ideas of what professional development the district could provide to enhance their effectiveness as principal supervisors (see Appendix C).

Information about principal supervisors was also solicited from a sample of the principals on each principal supervisor's caseload. The sample of principals included in the study was obtained from stratified random sampling procedures to identify 20% of the principals supervised by each principal supervisor (see Table 6). The researcher provided an open-ended questionnaire to all identified principals to collect their perception of what knowledge, skills, practices, and training they believe principal supervisors need to help them as principals improve their effectiveness in increasing student achievement (see Appendix D).

Table 6

Selected Principals from Principal Supervisor Caseload

Principal Supervisor	Level	# of Principals Selected	Years of Principal Experience	Gender		Race/ Ethnicity		
				Female	Male	Asian	Black	White
PS1	Middle	4	3 to 10	1	3	1	1	2
PS2	Elem	3	6 to 10	3	0	0	0	3
PS3	High	3	2 to 8	0	3	0	0	3
PS4	Elem	3	1 to 12	1	2	0	1	2
PS5	Elem	4	0 to 14	3	1	0	1	3
PS6	Elem	3	1 to 5	2	1	0	0	3
PS7	Elem	4	1 to 6	3	1	0	2	2
PS8	High	1	9	1	0	0	0	1
PS9	Middle	4	0 to 13	2	2	0	0	4

Interviews.

Use of a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to keep the conversation focused on a narrow range of topics to uncover more details about the topics (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Seven GCPS principal supervisors volunteered to be interviewed for the study. The interviews, lasting thirty minutes, explored the relationships and intersections between individual and collective learning from prior professional learning experiences and the private and public application of the learning from the individual principal supervisor's perspective (potential open-ended questions and prompts are included as Appendix E).

Observations.

As a participant observer, the researcher viewed the actions of subjects from a member's perspective, which influenced the situation because of active involvement (Flick, 2006). The researcher joined three principal supervisors on Paired Observations, a professional learning opportunity in which principal supervisors used a protocol to observe each other interacting with a principal and providing feedback to each other. The purpose of these paired observations was to provide principal supervisors with opportunities to share their practices with their peers, receive feedback from peers as they practice their coaching skills with principals, and create shared practices across the team to reduce variability. A specifically designed observation protocol was used to capture descriptive and reflective notes from the observations (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) (see Appendix F).

As specific themes emerged from the data about principal supervisor training experiences, the sample of principal supervisors and the line of questioning was further refined. Using the quadrant descriptors from Vygotsky Space, appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization (Gallucci et al., 2010), the researcher began to connect the sociocultural

learning theory influences within and across principal supervisors to compare the conditions and perceptions of approaches (John-Steiner, & Mahn, 1996). Themes related to how training for principal supervisors affect principals' performance surfaced from sorted, coded, structured, and restructured data (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003).

Data analysis methods.

The process of analyzing data involved breaking apart pieces of information and putting them back together in new ways that provided a description of the data and also a deeper understanding of the objects and events that produced the data (Dey, 2016). Through data analysis, researchers can not only describe data, but also interpret, explain, understand, and even make predictions. The researcher coded the data and identified key categories and themes using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis program, after each round of data collection (Schutt, 1996). The researcher looked for evidence of appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization according to the Vygotsky Space model (Gallucci, 2008). Sociocultural learning theory created the need for the researcher to look for evidence of social learning through modeling; though modeling was not coded specifically during the analysis process (Schutt, 1996). A broader view was sought initially in an attempt to identify ways the culture of the organization connects with the individual to enhance learning opportunities. The outcomes related to principal supervisors and their principals was analyzed using qualitative data analysis in an attempt to uncover the relationships between professional development efforts and the capacity building of principal supervisors (Honig et al., 2010).

Specific steps taken using qualitative data analysis included identifying the desired outcome and the conditions that could lead to achievement of the desired outcome (Ragin, 2014). In this case, the desired outcome was the collective improvement of principal supervisors'

knowledge and skills to effectively develop and strengthen the instructional capacity of the principals they support. The next step was to determine the possible conditions leading to the desired outcome. According to Fullen and Quinn (2016), these conditions could include developing a common language, understanding, and skills base across all district leaders, identifying proven instructional practices, modeling learning, and incorporating the whole system by building the capacity of all.

Data interpretation methods.

Case study research calls for “examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (Yin, 2009, p.109). After the collected documents, questionnaires, interviews, and observations were transcribed and coded using MAXQDA, the researcher returned to the data a second time to inflict the coded outcomes more intentionally with a higher level of intensity. The second view began to connect the data to the study’s overriding principles of developing principal supervisors’ knowledge and skills around developing principals in a social context (Yin, 2009). As the researcher continued to interpret the data, a third perusal of the data explored the sources of data to confirm the objective truth surrounding each case (Yin, 2009).

The researcher took a thematic approach to explore the connections between the study’s guiding questions and the four components in the Vygotsky’s Space (Gallucci, 2008). Was there evidence of appropriation in individual thinking because of interaction with other people? Was there transformed thinking evidenced through personal work? Was there individual publication evidenced through talk and/or action caused by the new learning? Was there evidence of a conventional approach to the collective work of the principal supervisor team (Gallucci et al., 2010)? Ultimately, would principal supervisors articulate the knowledge and skills they needed

to support principals effectively and would principals recognize new or strengthened principal supervisor practices that could help them as principals improve their leadership effectiveness? Through triangulation of multiple sources, the chain of evidence, and member checking, the researcher continued to validate the data through the conclusion of this study (Yin, 2009).

Limitations, bias, and trustworthiness.

Limitations are inherent in case study methodology, beginning with the selection of the case or cases the researcher considers worthy of the study (Creswell, 2007). This research study was limited to principal supervisors from one of the school districts selected by The Wallace Foundation for the Principal Pipeline and Principal Supervisor Initiatives (Wallace Foundation, 2014; Turnbull et al., 2013). Thirteen other districts were excluded due to time and researcher workload constraints. Additionally, the researcher only examined certain sources of data, such as principal supervisor job descriptions, site visit documentation, survey and interview results, and available data related to the effectiveness of principals supported by the identified principal supervisors. While the study may provide insight on training and professional development opportunities for principal supervisors in one school district, it did not focus on principal supervisor selection and hiring.

Characteristic of qualitative case study research is an inherent bias created due to the need for all data to be filtered through the researcher (Fink, 2000). As a district leader in the district being researched, the researcher was cognizant of her beliefs and opinions related to the topic of the study and actively sought to transcend her own biases. To aid in this process, the researcher collected data from a variety of sources in an attempt to view principal supervisors' professional development from different angles.

Consistent with case studies, the use of multiple methods ensured trustworthiness and decreased biases (Golafshani, 2003). Data interpretation occurred through thematic coding aligned to the guiding questions (Ayres et al., 2003). Trends in the data were linked to the theoretical framework guiding the study. Study participants received copies of interview transcripts and coded information to confirm accuracy. Participants were also solicited for additional information related to the study prior to the release of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Results

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the influence of professional learning for principal supervisors on their individual instructional leadership capacity and the collective capacity of the team of principal supervisors. The findings that follow, through the lens of each data collection instrument, speak to a need for specially designed professional development for principal supervisors. These discoveries highlighted similarities between the knowledge and skills both principal supervisors and principals believed principal supervisors needed to better support principals. The outcomes described in the findings also pointed to a need for principal supervisors to engage in learning experiences that are both public and private and encourage growth for the individual and across the team of principal supervisors.

Survey.

Responses to the Principal Supervisor Professional Development Survey by 100% of GCPS principal supervisors indicated all had participated in what they defined as professional learning within the year (see Table 7). When the professional learning was tied to specific Model Principal Supervisor Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015), the responses ranged from a high of 89% (Standards 1 & 2) to a low of 44% (Standard 6). The quality of their

learning experiences ranged from a high of 79% (Standard 2) to a low of 27% (Standard 7). The impact of the learning on their practice ranged from a high of 78% (Standard 5) to a low of 27% (Standard 7). When taking a closer look at the three descriptive categories, trends begin to emerge related to the categories. From 89% to 67% of principal supervisors attended professional development related to educational leadership (Standards 1-4). Of these respondents, an average of 63% rated the quality of the learning and 53% rated the impact of the learning at the highest level. Fewer principal supervisors, an average of 49%, attended professional development related to district leadership (Standards 5-6). However, an average of 69% of attendees rated the quality of the learning at the highest level and 59% rated the impact on their learning at the highest level. While an average of 67% of principal supervisors noted they attended professional development related to developing their own instructional leadership capacity (Standards 7-8), their feelings about the quality and impact varied greatly between the two standards.

Table 7

Principal Supervisor Professional Development Survey

During this school year, I have participated in professional learning related to:		If YES, rate the quality of the learning experience (4 = Highest; 1 = lowest)				If YES, rate the impact of the learning on your practice (4 = Highest; 1 = lowest)			
	Yes	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
STANDARD 1: Principal Supervisors dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders.	89%	59%	41%	0%	0%	47%	47%	6%	0%
STANDARD 2: Principal Supervisors coach and support individual principals and engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders	89%	79%	21%	0%	0%	63%	39%	0%	0%
STANDARD 3: Principal Supervisors use evidence of principals' effectiveness to determine necessary improvements in principals' practice to foster a positive educational environment that supports the diverse cultural and learning needs of students.	67%	64%	36%	0%	0%	64%	36%	0%	0%
STANDARD 4: Principal Supervisors engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders	78%	44%	44%	112%	0%	38%	56%	6%	0%
STANDARD 5: Principal Supervisors advocate for and inform the coherence of organizational vision, policies, and strategies to support schools and student learning	56%	78%	11%	11%	0%	78%	11%	11%	0%
STANDARD 6: Principal Supervisors assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student	44%	60%	40%	0%	0%	40%	40%	20%	0%
STANDARD 7: Principal Supervisors engage in their own development and continuous improvement to help principals grow as instructional leaders.	67%	27%	64%	9%	0%	27%	64%	9%	0%
STANDARD 8: Principal Supervisors lead strategic change that continuously elevates the performance of schools and sustains high-quality educational programs and opportunities across the district.	67%	78%	22%	0%	0%	72%	22%	6%	0%

Questionnaires.

Seven of the nine study participants replied to the anonymous Principal Supervisor Open-Ended Questionnaire. In response to the question, “As a principal supervisor, what knowledge and skills do you feel are needed to effectively support principals?”, common beliefs around needing to possess strong leadership skills, needing to be instructionally focused, having the ability to coach others, and having knowledge of how to access resources to support principals effectively surfaced. One principal supervisor responded with,

The skills needed are: 1) Be able to collaborate, communicate, engage, and empower others; 2) Be a professional that operates fairly and equitably and displays integrity; 3) Make informed decisions; 4) Be able to create an organizational vision; 5) Understand instruction, instructional culture, and vision; 6) Ability to garner resources.

The question “How do you determine your effectiveness in supporting and developing your principals?” elicited comments related to using student achievement measures, gathering feedback from principals and assistant principals, and the quality of the relationship with principals. Another question asked, “What practices do you feel are valued by your principals to help them improve as instructional leaders?” Principal supervisors stated principals value practices such as providing feedback, offering guidance, and ongoing collaboration to help them improve as instructional leaders. One stated principals appreciate practices such as,

Asking questions that challenge their thinking about school performance; reviewing data together and asking questions about how data relates to school improvement goals; providing leadership and support to their school during situations that require district involvement; providing data to schools that helps them determine effectiveness of student programs; and setting school improvement goals.

The final question asked principal supervisors to share their ideas of what professional development could be provided by the district to enhance their effectiveness as principal supervisors. A desire for professional development to strengthen their coaching skills was mentioned by 71% of questionnaire completers. Professional development on balancing coaching and evaluation, on providing differentiated support to principals, and opportunities to discuss problems of practice with colleagues also surfaced from the responses.

Twenty percent of principals on each principal supervisor's caseload were invited to respond to a questionnaire with similar questions, viewed from a principal's perspective. Ninety-three percent of the stratified, randomly selected principals shared their thoughts on their Principal Open-Ended Questionnaire. Their first question was "What knowledge and skills do you feel a principal supervisor needs to effectively support principals?" The three most common responses were (a) experience as an effective principal; (b) solid instructional leadership capacity; and (c) strong interpersonal skills. As one principal stated,

First and foremost, a principal supervisor must have been a principal. This knowledge and experience will enable them to have a full understanding of the principal's role in a building. The supervisor should also be an instructional leader, possessing knowledge and skills regarding instruction and assessment, and how teachers and leaders should utilize a variety of data (quantitative and qualitative) to drive instructional decisions. The supervisor should also have strong communication skills and the ability to think outside the box. This will enable him/her to support the principal's growth.

Another principal shared,

I feel a principal supervisor should have at least 5 to 7 successful years as a principal. If someone has not been in the position very long, it is difficult for a sitting principal to trust

they have the necessary knowledge to supervise others. It would be beneficial to have experiences at both Title I and non-Title I schools, but it is primarily important that they have had successful experiences and have supported the vision of the county at the local school level. In addition, it is imperative for a principal supervisor to be able to build relationships and establish trust with the principals. This is mainly done through conversations, respecting individuals, and having knowledge of the various schools that they supervise, including celebrations and areas of need. In order for a supervisor to truly support a principal, they need to maintain current knowledge of initiatives and understand how to provide support without appearing to give “directives” – unless it is absolutely necessary – and it is important that they have the authority to do so when it is necessary. It would be excellent if the primary focus of the principal supervisor could be instruction (although management support could also be provided).

One other principal replied to this question with,

Principal supervisors need to, primarily, have extensive experience as a principal. They need to understand the dynamics of different school communities and how to respond to a variety of needs within a school. In addition, the supervisor should have a clear understanding of the district's policies and procedures, and have a deep understanding of current initiatives. In addition, they should have deep understanding of school improvement and how to move a school forward.

For the question, “What principal supervisor practices do you value that you believe help you improve as a principal?” the top three responses were honest feedback from their principal supervisor, shared accountability of results with their principal supervisor, and being coached by their principal supervisor. One explained, “I value honest conversations. I need to be able to trust

that my principal supervisor can and wants to provide support to ensure that I can do the best job possible as a principal.” In relation to co-ownership of results, one principal wrote, “Hold me accountable and help me meet and exceed my expectations. Share the tough information and celebrate the successes.” Forty-one percent of principals stated direct coaching by the principal supervisor was a valued practice. A principal added,

I appreciate when my supervisor challenges my ideas and asks me to think critically about the decisions that I make; evaluates and discusses data from a global perspective; questions my vision and if my implementation plan is aligned to help me achieve the vision.

One responding principal summarized with,

Honest and direct feedback - I should never be confused about how a supervisor thinks of my work or the work of my teachers/staff; collaboration is important to me - truly knowing my school's data, listening to what I say and working together to improve are important.

When asked about how they determine their own effectiveness in supporting and developing their staff, responding principals cited many sources. These included evidence from student achievement results at the classroom, grade, and school level, conversations with stakeholders, and engagement levels. One principal shared:

I frequently ask teachers and specific teacher-leaders if they are getting the support they need to be successful; in both formal and informal settings, I ask teachers what support pieces are missing from their daily work; through observations, I am able to determine which teachers need additional support and development; changes in classroom practices

indicate development of teachers; ultimately, improvement in school-wide student achievement produces evidence of appropriate support and development of teachers.

Principal respondents suggested the district provide professional development to principal supervisors on coaching, providing feedback, and differentiating support. Many stated that they believed principal supervisors needed to attend professional development related to district initiatives and instructional strategies side-by-side with principals as another way to enhance principal supervisors' support of principals.

Interviews.

Seven of the nine GCPS principal supervisors volunteered to be interviewed for this study (see Table 8). Interviewees provided background information about themselves related to the length of time they had been in the role of principal supervisor, how long they had been with the district, and their positions held prior to becoming a principal supervisor. They described their experiences prior to becoming a principal supervisor as well as those experiences since becoming a principal supervisor. Principal supervisors were asked if they attended any type of professional development (which was defined however the individual defined the term, professional development) within the past year and the structure of the professional development in which they participated (see Table 8, blanks indicate no information was shared related to the descriptor).

Table 8

Professional Development for Principal Supervisors

Description of Professional Development (PD)	PS A	PS B	PS C	PS D	PS E	PS F	PS G
Participated in PD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participate in PD Individually, Self-Selected	X	X	X	X		X	X
Participate in PD with Principals	X	X	X			X	X
Participate in PD with Team	X		X	X	X		X
Participate in Year-Long PD with a Cohort of Learners	X	X	X				X
Lead PD for Principals			X			X	

Principal Supervisors were also asked about the intended outcomes of the professional development they attended. After sharing details regarding participation in a year-long training program with a cohort of principal supervisors from across the country, Principal Supervisor B said,

What it did was it helped with the process by which I actually engage in observations at the school level. So it improved the work I do around monitoring student work, relative to the [school's] plan for improvement, it improved the work that I do with principals relative to analysis of the data at the school level, and the questioning and the types of questions that I ask of the principal in order for us to map out a plan for school improvement.

Principal Supervisor C shared her practice changed due to involvement in a variety of professional development experiences,

My knowledge has increased in specific areas, my knowledge of specific instructional strategies has increased, my work with my targeted schools has become even more focused, and the support I provide for those schools, is very, very specific in order to develop the capacity of the teachers and the principal.

Principal Supervisor G explained that involvement in professional learning experiences “really helped us center our work”.

The following question was asked of the principal supervisors to discern their institutional perspective and connect the interview questions directly to the study’s guiding questions. “What knowledge and skills do you believe are needed to support principals effectively?” All seven principal supervisors mentioned the benefits gained from having previous success as a principal in the district. Principal Supervisor D said, “The first thing is that you had to have been an effective principal”. The principal supervisors mentioned they needed to know deeply about instructional leadership. Principal Supervisor A elaborated, “You have to know a lot about what good instructional leadership looks like. It’s two-fold. You can know about leadership practices but if you don’t know something about instruction you can’t fully support the principal”.

They believed they also had to have skills in operational and managerial areas. They shared they needed to know and understand the district’s initiatives and the superintendent’s strategic priorities as well as be aware of district resources and know how to access the resources on behalf of their principals. Four principal supervisors also talked about the need to be able to form relationships with the principals they supported. Principal Supervisor E stressed, “You’ve got to be able to work with people who do the work in schools. You can’t go in and be the principal, you’re not the principal”. To summarize the knowledge and skills principal supervisors

needed to most effectively support and develop principals, Principal Supervisor G replied with,

You will use every skill that you have ever acquired in life. It, of course, requires people skills. It requires being able to differentiate for each of your principals that you work alongside. Sometimes I miss the mark on that. When I reflect back over my days, sometimes I think, maybe I was too direct in one area. So I have to constantly reevaluate my people skills. But it also requires having had the experience as a principal. I had a lot of experience as a principal and those experiences have helped me in this role. It has helped me to know the pivotal practices that will move a school forward and the practices that aren't going to make a difference at all, that are not going to impact a school. I can help the principal know how to spend their time each day to maximize their influence, their impact, and their power on increasing student learning.

When asked about ways they shared the learning from professional development opportunities with each other, four of the seven principal supervisors mentioned a formal process where items could be added to their bi-monthly meeting agenda and discussed as a team. All seven expressed the more frequent and informal ways information is shared with select peers or with the whole team. Principal Supervisor A called these “anecdotal conversations” that happened over lunch, in passing, between principal supervisors who support the same level (elementary, middle, or high) or with those whose offices happen to be next door.

These principal supervisors described their beliefs about the role of principal supervisors, in their own words through their examples and responses to interview questions. Specific views emerged related to how individuals saw themselves as a principal supervisor in relation to the type of support given to principals. Descriptions about their work and the purpose of their professional development suggested some of these principal supervisors approach their work

through the stance of a developer of principals, an instructor of principals, a manager of principals, a supporter of principals, and focused on the operational performance of principals (see Table 9).

Table 9

Principal Supervisor Roles in Supporting Principals

Principal Supervisor Roles in Supporting Principals	Description of Role from Interviews with Principal Supervisors
Developer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work alongside the principal to help them grow their school, mainly in the area of instruction - Help principals improve the quality of instruction - Help principals get better in their instructional leadership - Model instructional leadership for principals - Ensure the principal has the capacity to lead the school in identified areas so our student achievement will increase - Guide principals to engage in instructional conversations with teachers
Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership of people - Understand all data - More directive
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - District level based position - Have to move a group that sometimes may not agree with the direction - Know when to pull and when to push
Supporter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barter goods, information, and services - Advocate for principals - Support role
Operational Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have working knowledge of the level and schools you supervise - Focus on structure - School improvement in operations

The principal supervisors described the purpose and function of their role in a variety of ways. The individual focus of support internalized by each principal supervisor was expressed in their evidence of the impact professional development had on each to better support and develop principals, in the challenges they have in developing their own capacity to better support and

develop principals, and in the types of professional development they believe are needed at the district level to help them be more effective (see Table 10).

Table 10

Principal Supervisor Support, Impact, Challenge, and Needs of Professional Development (PD)

Principal Supervisor	Individual Type of Support to Principals	Evidence of PD Impact	Challenges for Team	Desired Future PD
PS A	Developer	Change observed in classrooms	Time; alignment of practices	Alignment with Curriculum & Instruction; shared experiences
PS B	Instructor	In principal's actions	Keep up with changes at federal, state, & local levels	Around PS standards
PS C	Developer	Changes in own practice	Time; beliefs and personalities of individuals	Around PS standards; coaching
PS D	Manager	Through asking questions	Belief in the "rightness" of own approaches	Around individual strengths and coaching
PS E	Operational Performance	Feedback from principals	Time; additional duties and responsibilities	Common learning experiences around responsibilities, and expectations; aligned to instructional components
PS F	Supporter	Observation	Lack of clarity in role	Based on common expectations; partnered with Curriculum & Instruction; learn from PS in other districts
PS G	Developer	In principals' actions	Diversity in approaches across the team	Pair observations; peer coaching; coaching techniques; aligned to curriculum, instruction, & assessment

Observations.

Principal supervisors involved in The Wallace Foundation Principal Supervisor Initiative were asked to take part in paired schools visits, provide feedback to each other, and then reflect on the experience in preparation for a combined Principal Supervisor and Principal Pipeline Initiative convening. Three GCPS principal supervisors (PS A, PS C, and PS G) were asked to participate in the experience. They incorporated the required protocol into their own Paired Observation Protocol on their shared visits to three schools.

After each observation the three debriefed with each other about what was going well at the school, suggested next steps based on the observation, discussed support that could be provided to the principal and/or school, and provided additional recommendations for the leading principal supervisor.

During one of the Paired Observations, the observing principal supervisors noticed PS G focusing heavily on monitoring the work of the principal and providing feedback to the principal. The principal supervisor primarily asked questions of the principal. She stated she wanted to uncover the principal's thinking about day-to-day practices in the classrooms to determine their connection to the school's Local School Plan for Improvement. When asked about next steps for the principal, the principal supervisor stressed a need to, "continue to point out, ask questions about, and seek out evidence of growth around the areas of focus; begin looking for the level of rigor in lessons and ways to increase it."

The team of three principal supervisors discussed their key noticings from the observations. One big idea was the principal supervisor is not the principal so conversations with the principal have to be frequent and ongoing to uncover the barriers, the real issues getting in the way of the work. They pointed out a need to model best practices for their principals,

assistant principals, and teacher leaders. They also discussed the need to be comfortable with being more direct at times with certain principals and in certain situations.

Through the use of a shared protocol, debriefing opportunities turned more reflective regarding individual approaches to developing their own and their principals' instructional leadership capacity. PS C commented she knew she and the principal still had work to do and shared her questions and concerns aloud about the classrooms observed in one school.

Who is planning the lessons? The instructional coach? How is responsibility for planning being scaled? What is the gradual release? Will the current focus on the standards be maintained? How will the principal monitor the rigor of the lessons?

This principal supervisor shared she would not push the principal on these concerns right then. PS A challenged her supportingly with, "Why not now?" PS C shared her thinking,

I think I need to be more strategic by linking my concerns to the next school visit. I want to intentionally follow up our observed actions with some of these questions to authentically uncover the principal's thinking about where they are and where they are going.

The exchange between the principal supervisors after each of the three Paired Observations was grounded in a learning stance. Feedback was meant to support each other in the work, identify individual principal supervisor moves that had a positive impact on the principals they supported, and uncover promising practices that, when scaled across the team of principal supervisors, could improve the team's ability to support and grow district principals.

Findings

Use of Vygotsky Space (Gallucci et al., 2010) helped the researcher examine the nature of professional learning for principal supervisors. The focus was on the relationships between, across, and among principal supervisors. Themes emerged based on the four iterative phases found in Vygotsky Space – appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization.

Learning through thought and talk (appropriation).

Through the lens of appropriation, the way a person thinks based on collective interactions with others, themes related to interactions with others, collaboration, and two-way communication were revealed. Through the questionnaire and interviews, principal supervisors shared information about learning opportunities they valued due to a social component. Frequently mentioned were the benefits from participating in professional development with other principal supervisors as well as the principals they supported. These shared experiences spawned informal conversations about what they heard and saw which led to structured conversations. Through collaboration during formal team meetings, the observed principal supervisor moves were appropriated as formalized principal supervisor actions that could benefit all principals. They shared they valued opportunities to discuss their work with each other. They asked each other reflective questions to uncover promising practices that could help them grow the capacity of their principals. They brought many ideas to the table for the purpose of sharing and collaborating with each other. Many principal supervisors hinted at the idea that these conversations led to enhanced relationships with colleagues. The stronger relationships created a willingness to share ideas and receptiveness to new ideas.

Learning internalized and realized (transformation).

The lens of transformation, private ownership of thinking, uncovered themes associated with having vast knowledge of subjects, being reflective, and being a learner. Principal supervisors discussed how changes at the federal, state, and local levels are causing them to rethink their work. To stay abreast of the changes, some shared they continually read and research information related to their role and the district's role in improving student achievement. Each principal supervisor expressed ways they are constantly learning. They believe they owed it to themselves and to their principals to be as knowledgeable as possible about district expectations and policy and procedure, as well as initiatives and instructional strategies. The majority of the principal supervisors stated they are naturally reflective and continually replay conversations with principals in their heads to attempt to uncover their level of impact on their principals and improve their craft. They embodied the district's value in continuous quality improvement and knew there was always room for improvement.

Learning shared with others (publication).

The publication lens, individual sharing of new learning with others, brought to light ideas linked to challenging thinking, offering advice, and mentoring. Principal supervisors who participated in paired observations used the shared experience as a springboard to continue the conversation with their peers. They were eager to share the results of their first attempts at applying the strategies observed in the paired observations. What worked, what did not work, why or why not, and proposed next steps. They asked each other questions that challenged their thinking in attempts to improve their practice. They wanted to be pushed in their thinking and practice so they could do the same for their principals, not just those with room to improve, but also those high-achieving principals who thrive on challenges.

Learning used to grow others (conventionalization).

Finally, through the lens of conventionalization, publically demonstrating use of the learning individually as well in others' works, ideas connected to providing support, offering feedback, and coaching were noted. Principal supervisors believed much of the training they received showed up in a variety of ways when interacting with each other and when working with their principals. The coaching support they received strengthened their coaching of principals. Questioning strategies utilized became more facilitative and less directive. They were more intentional about growing the ability of their principals instead of making principals dependent on them for answers. With increased knowledge and skills, they felt they were better able to monitor the work and implementation of the work in their schools. They attended administrative meetings, grade level meetings, and academy meetings in the schools they supported. They partnered with principals to make sure the work was getting done with the fidelity of practice necessary in a large school district. Principal supervisors reported their growing comfort and confidence levels in working with, leading, and developing adult learners. They expressed a desire to continue to learn more and develop their skills around coaching for the benefit of their principals and schools.

Evidence collected from principal supervisors and principals, via a variety of data collection instruments, and viewed through the lens of Vygotsky Space indicated that principal supervisors and principals had a clear understanding of the knowledge and skills principal supervisors needed to help principals increase their effectiveness. Principal supervisors valued and desired additional professional development designed specifically to help them better understand their role, including the responsibilities and expectations. They also expressed the realization that they needed to formalize their learning individually and collectively, internally

and externally to provide equitable support for principals regardless of principal supervisor caseload assignment. Table 11 provides statements from principal supervisors about their learning that occurred in different phases of development. Becoming more intentional about providing professional development opportunities for principal supervisors in each phase of learning could afford districts the operational leverage needed to decrease variability and increase the knowledge and skills across the team of principal supervisors.

Table 11

Coded Themes through the Lens of Vygotsky Space

Code	Sub-Code	Number of Occurrences	Example of Learning
Appropriation	Interactions with Others	54	<i>I've participated in professional development with people who are also principal supervisors and actually learned from them about the art of supervising principals.</i>
	Communication	27	<i>Intense conversations about the development of the measures of our practice has really shaped what I do when I'm out in schools.</i>
	Collaboration	7	<i>The transformation from just a regular sheet of paper to the document itself was a result of collaboration among all principal supervisors, so that we could decrease variability in our practice.</i>
Transformation	Reflection	11	<i>I began to ask questions of them and of myself, so how do we know if what we're doing is making a difference, other than looking at common assessment results? And is it too late once we start looking at the assessment results? How do we know we are affecting change if we don't get into the classrooms?</i>
	Learner	21	<i>I've had opportunities to observe other principal supervisors in their craft, learn how to give them feedback, and then learn how to take that same type of feedback to impact my work and my role in supporting principals.</i>
	Knowledge	8	<i>My knowledge has increased in specific ways, my knowledge of specific instructional strategies has increased, my work with my targeted schools has even become more focused, and the support I provide for those schools is very, very specific in order to develop the capacity of the teachers and the principals.</i>

Table 12

Coded Themes through the Lens of Vygotsky Space

Code	Sub-Code	Number of Occurrences	Example of Learning
Publication	Offer Advice	6	<i>When we are together as a team, we end up talking about the work. We end up talking about what we do in our role and about problems and practices that we're facing and how we can help each other with those problems and practices.</i>
	Challenge Thinking	3	<i>We just have to make sure that we are honest about what we are thinking but be willing to be influenced.</i>
Conventionalization	Instructional Leader	7	<i>We understood what it meant to be an instructional leader but coaching another instructional leader about how to be an instructional leader, it's a whole different ballgame.</i>
	Feedback	13	<i>Our work can be isolated. You think you are doing the right thing. You think you have the right approach in place but you really don't know what you don't know unless you get feedback.</i>
	Support	8	<i>We share ideas on how to keep track of all the information that we gather from each school because ultimately that results in the principal's evaluation. We share ideas for organizing our visits. We share strategies, and even resources.</i>
	Coach	28	<i>I tried something you did with one of my principals. Here's what I learned, here's what I did, talk to me about that. Was I doing it the right way? Was there something else I could have done to make this more effective for the principal? I think it increases our effectiveness to have those kinds of relationships and that ongoing face-to-face practical PD.</i>

* Information collected from principal supervisor questionnaires, interviews, and observations

Future considerations.

All GCPS leaders in the role during the study moved from the principalship to the principal supervisor position. However, moving from the role of principal to principal supervisor is not like moving from the position of sous-chef to master chef. It is more like moving from sous-chef to master gardener. To successfully make the transition and continue to be successful, very different training is needed. Principal supervisor professional development needs to be targeted, specific, and differentiated to meet the needs of the individual and the team (Anderson, Mascall, Stiegelbauer, & Park, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015).

There is still much to learn about the types and impact of professional development for principal supervisors. A more in-depth study of professional development specifically for principal supervisors could aid school districts in making decisions about possible leadership training opportunities. Additional research on the strategies and approaches principal supervisors use to develop principals could also benefit districts looking to improve principal effectiveness.

The next step for the researcher is the creation of an executive summary of this study for the district's supervisor of principal supervisors. Information about principal supervisors' views of their role, how they determine the impact of their work with principals, their identified challenges as a team, and the type of professional development desired to increase the effectiveness of their work with principals will be included. A potential next step for the district is a more intentional focus on the requirements of and support for principal supervisors to meet their individual and collective needs with the goal of decreasing variance in approach and increasing the effectiveness of all principals due to principal supervisor support and development of principals. The next steps at the state level could be to tie the results and recommendations

from this study to the development of the state ESSA plan that, for the first time at the state level, introduces principal supervisors as a needed element when focusing on principal development.

Conclusions

Research pointed to the need to move beyond the schoolhouse and into district offices to positively impact student achievement (Fink, 2014; Honig, 2008; Mitgang 2013; Waters & Marzano 2006). Examining individual and organizational training and training structures for principal supervisors in distinct phases of learning yielded strategies to identify effective use of existing structures and expertise.

Using the quadrants of Vygotsky Space to examine potential outcomes of professional development for principal supervisors led to thinking about the organizational support of principal supervisors' learning. Quadrant I, the intersection of conventionalization and appropriation, is collective participation in a public setting. It is in this space where common tools are created and a common language is established. It is where the tools and language come together to create coherence across the team of principal supervisors and reduce variability in the approaches and outcomes for the principals and schools they support. Quadrant II, the intersection of appropriation and transformation, is the internalization of collaborative talk. It is where practices such as paired observations allow principal supervisors to practice strategies, receive feedback, and then think about and discuss new ideas around supporting principals and schools. Quadrant III, the intersection of transformation and publication, is an internal change in belief and practice. It is where principal supervisors apply new strategies and approaches independently across their caseload of principals. Quadrant IV, the intersection of publication and conventionalization, is the public display of learning. It is where principal supervisors utilize

their newly refined promising practices to develop the capacity of their principals. It is where they model approaches and strategies for their principals so they, in turn, can grow the abilities of their assistant principals and teachers.

This study sought to explore ways principal supervisors approached and experienced professional development. The findings suggested when professional development is designed to provide learning opportunities in both public and private domains and address individual and collective needs, a positive impact on principal supervisors was achieved. Strategically designed professional development can be a powerful driver of student achievement through the lever of principal supervisors. To maximize the impact of principal supervisors, the following shifts in thinking and practice are recommended:

- A shift from selecting principal supervisors from principals with positive school results to the strategic appointment of leaders with positive school results and a known and documented success rate of developing others.

If the role of the principal supervisor is one focused on developing the capacity of principals, then evidence of this skill set must be surfaced during the selection process. Does evidence of capacity building exist in data trends related to student achievement results, in evaluations of the candidate's assistant principals and staff, in the accomplishments of those under the supervision of the candidate, or in the minds and words of those who work under the candidate?

- A shift from the assumption that principal supervisors know the role and have the required abilities to deliberately providing principal supervisors professional development related to required skills and responsibilities.

Principal supervisors see their role in supporting principals in a variety of ways. When left to interpret and act on their own assumptions about the position, variance in approach and type of support for principals increases across the team of supervisors resulting in decreased reliability principals have about the guidance they will receive from their assigned principal supervisors. Is there a defined and described set of principal supervisor standards to guide the work and is professional development provided for principal supervisors that aligns directly to these standards?

- A shift from optional attendance in professional learning to the strategic development of professional development growth plans based on individual needs.

Principal supervisors described a variety of approaches to professional development. Many of these learning opportunities came in the form of district wide meetings with the superintendent or training for school leaders that they attended with the principals they supported. Is specific, job-embedded professional learning available for principal supervisors, is it tailored to individual and team needs, and is continual learning and improvement an expectation for those in the role?

- A shift from a random approach to professional development to an aligned one that capitalizes on the strengths of individuals to benefit the entire team of principal supervisors.

Principal supervisors enter the role with a wide range of experiences and expertise. Capitalizing on past successes and talents could increase the effectiveness of individuals and the collective team of principal supervisors. Has a needs assessment been conducted to ensure professional development is designed to maximize individual strengths and

close the knowledge and skill gap high for all principal supervisors thus insuring high-quality, equal support for principals?

- A shift from sole ownership of the support and development of principals to the collective responsibility of the team of supervisors for the success of all schools, principals, and students.

Principal supervisors have a large caseload and support a wide range of principals, each with their own unique set of needs. Utilizing the knowledge, strengths, and talents of the team of principal supervisors could provide additional resources where they are most needed. Are principal supervisors held accountable for the success of all schools, principals, and students and how could this structure be supported through professional development for principal supervisors?

Ultimately, by raising the bar for themselves through individual and collective professional development, principal supervisors can raise the bar for the principals they support. Improving processes involved in recruiting and selecting principal supervisors, then focusing heavily on training, developing, and strengthening the knowledge and skills of principal supervisors, school districts could potentially decrease variability and increase results from school to school. This type of change will not be easy and will require a drastic shift in the way school districts traditionally operate. However, creating a collaborative culture of development for leaders at all levels of the organization may improve teaching and learning for all students (Anderson et al, 2012; Honig et al., 2010; Saphier & Durkin, 2011; Washington, 2009).

Why is this important? As described by one of Gwinnett County Public Schools' most effective principal supervisors,

As the principal supervisor learns,

The principal learns;

As the principal learns,

The teacher learns;

As the teacher learns,

The student learns.

It is vital that we all continually learn both collectively and individually, so our students can meet and exceed every challenge for school, college, career, and life.

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STANDARD 4: Principal Supervisors engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders.

[illegible]

STANDARD 6: Principal Supervisors assist the district in ensuring the community of schools with which they engage are culturally/socially responsive and have equitable access to resources necessary for the success of each student.

[illegible]

STANDARD 8: Principal Supervisors lead strategic change that continuously elevates the performance of schools and sustains high-quality educational programs and opportunities across the district.

[illegible]

APPENDIX B:**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. As a principal supervisor, what knowledge and skills do you feel are needed to effectively support principals?
2. What evidence did you use to respond to question #1?
3. What practices do you feel are valued by your principals to help them improve as instructional leaders?
4. Please share your ideas of what professional development your district could provide to enhance your effectiveness as a principal supervisor.

APPENDIX C:**PRINCIPAL OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. As a principal, what knowledge and skills do you feel a principal supervisor needs to support you effectively?
2. What evidence did you use to respond to question #1?
3. What practices do you feel are valued by your principal supervisor to help you improve as an instructional leader?
4. Please share your ideas of what professional development your district could provide to enhance principal supervisors' effectiveness.

APPENDIX D:**IN-DEPTH, SEMI-STRUCTURED
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe your experience prior to becoming a principal supervisor.
2. Describe your experience since becoming a principal supervisor.
3. Using your work calendar as a reference, how much of your time included opportunities for professional learning in the past year? Six months? Four weeks?
4. What was the structure of each professional learning opportunity? Who was the intended audience? Who actually attended?
5. What were the intended outcomes of and how effective was each professional learning opportunity?
6. How did you use the information from each professional learning opportunity in your role as principal supervisor?
7. What evidence of impact do you have regarding application of information from each professional learning opportunity?

APPENDIX E:
Principal Supervisor Observation Protocol

Date:	Site:
Time:	Participants:
Purpose of Observation:	
<i>DESCRIPTIVE NOTES- Observable</i>	<i>REFLECTIVE NOTES-Questions, interpretations</i>
Physical setting:	Physical setting:
Participants:	Participants:
Activity:	Activity:
Sequence of activity:	Sequence of activity:
Interactions:	Interactions:
Unplanned events:	Unplanned events:
Participants' comments:	Participants' comments:

Adapted from Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage